



3010 Grand Avenue
Waukegan, IL 60085-2399
Phone: (847) 377-8000
Fax: (847) 360-3656

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Contact: Leslie Piotrowski
(847) 377-8055
Marcia Stanek
(847) 377-8099

Health Department Recommends: Protect Yourself Against the Flu
By Practicing Healthy Habits

The Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center is encouraging residents to avoid the flu by practicing healthy habits.

“The flu is spread when a person who has the flu coughs or sneezes,” said Dale Galassie, the Health Department’s Executive Director. “Influenza may also be spread when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it and then touches his or her nose or mouth. That’s why it’s important to wash your hands frequently to protect yourself and your family against this illness.”

The Health Department encourages people to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice), especially before meals and prior to

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preparing meals. It also encourages people to enrich their diets with plenty of fruit and vegetables, poultry and fish, to be physically active and get plenty of sleep. Adults and children should drink plenty of fluids, every day. People who are in good health are less susceptible to the flu. Families can also consider using individual towelettes (with alcohol content) for pockets and purses, when running hot water is unavailable. They can also purchase easy to use bottles of hand sanitizers, like Purell. Employers may also consider providing these to reduce flu transmission in the workplace.

Influenza is caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract and spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. After a person has been infected with the virus, symptoms usually appear within one to four days. If you have the flu, you will have a sudden headache and dry cough, and you might have a runny nose and a sore throat. Your muscles will ache, you will be extremely tired, and you can have a fever up to 104°F (40°C). Most people feel better in a couple of days, but the tiredness and cough can last for two weeks or longer. Its repercussions can be severe, particularly in the elderly, chronically ill, and the very young. Many people confuse influenza with the "stomach flu." Symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting are uncommon with the flu, except in very young children. True influenza is a respiratory illness, not a gastrointestinal one.

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Outbreaks of influenza have been reported in several states, prompting increased demand for the flu vaccine. Due to the shortage, the Health Department has limited its remaining supply to high-risk groups. This includes people who are 50 years of age and older, those who have chronic medical conditions, and children 6 to 23 months old, particularly low income.

There are adequate supplies, still, of FluMist, which is a nasal spray form of the flu vaccine. It is appropriate for those 5–49 years of age, with some exceptions. It is not available through the Health Department, but may be available through private physicians.

The final Health Department clinic for adults, 50 years of age and older and those over 18 who have chronic medical conditions, will take place on Tuesday, December 16, at the Waukegan Township Senior Center, 414 S. Lewis, from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in Waukegan. Clinics for children (particularly 6 to 23 months of age) take place Monday through Friday, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Belvidere Annex, 2303 Dodge Avenue in Waukegan. For more information, please contact the Health Department's Immunizations Program at: (847) 377-8470.

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